



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council

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(860)441-6630

Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Kathryn M. Brown-Tracy, Bruce S. Flax, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Rita M. Schmidt, Paulann H. Sheets, and James L. Streeter

Monday, March 30, 2009

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

FYE 2010 BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING

I. ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Mayor Watson.

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor Flax, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter

Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Schmidt

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent, Superintendent of Schools Paul Kadri, Board of Education Chairman Beverly Washington, Board of Education Members Robert Peruzzotti, Brian Shirvell, Patricia Monahan Doyle, and Daniel Campbell, RTM Moderator Natalie Billing, RTM members, Town staff, Town Clerk Barbara Tarbox, and Office Assistant Lori Watrous.

II. OATH OF OFFICE

Town Clerk Barbara Tarbox swore in newly-elected Town Councilor Bruce S. Flax.

III. SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The Salute to the Flag was led by Councilor Flax.

IV. INTRODUCTION OF ELECTED OFFICIALS

Elected officials introduced themselves at the request of Mayor Watson.

V. READING OF PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

The Notice of Public Hearing pursuant to a resolution passed by the Town Council was read by Town Clerk Barbara Tarbox.

VI. BUDGET PRESENTATIONS

a. Town Manager

Town Manager Mark Oefinger presented a summary of the proposed Town budget for fiscal year 2010, outlining expenditures and revenues.

b. Superintendent of Schools

Superintendent Paul Kadri summarized the proposed Board of Education budget for 2010 through a slide show entitled, "Establishing Long Term Success & Stability During Difficult Economic Times". This presentation included a brief summary of Mr. Kadri's financial experience and background.

VII. OPENING OF PUBLIC HEARING

Mayor Watson called the FYE 2010 Budget Public Hearing to order at 8:52 p.m. The Mayor stated that due to the number of citizens speaking, each speaker would be limited to three minutes.

Nora Patterson, 363 Ridgewood Drive, commended the Town Manager for trying to tighten things within the community, but fears that some of the items affected will not be brought back in the future. She voiced her support of the educational system, but stated that there is a tendency to utilize programs and then within a few years dismiss them and purchase different ones. Ms.

Patterson suggested that flaws be ironed out in what is currently in place rather than just purchasing new programs. She pleaded with teachers and administrators to not accept raises this year to avoid losing any positions in the district.

Julie Maisch, 60 Colony Road, requested that the Council support the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra's request for \$3,000 to be used for a fall concert. She stated that there has been no increase in the request and many Groton residents are in the audience, the chorus, the friends of the orchestra group, and the youth orchestra.

Roger Arguelles, 177 Cedar Road, Mystic, stated that the value of homes has decreased tremendously, but the assessment is based on higher property values. He feels that the increase in the budget should be 0% or less in both the Town Operations and Board of Education budgets. Mr. Arguelles would like the Town to see if hybrid vehicles would be an effective avenue for cost savings.

John Sutherland, 32 Neptune Drive, stated that there will be significant increases in property taxes, and these increases could range from 9.9% to 20%. He believes that further reductions in the 2010 budget are needed and implores the Council and the RTM to consider the impact of the budget on residents.

Kevin G. Trejo, 536-L Shennecossett Road, requested that the Town Council find sensible solutions. He registered his concern over the decrease in Human Services, as this department has continued to handle more and more cases with fewer resources, and Mr. Trejo would like to see the Litton Avenue facility remain open. He noted the importance of public safety to deter increased crime rates. He praised the Parks and Recreation Department on the wonderful job they do. Mr. Trejo would prefer no lay-offs and requested the teachers' union give back 1% of their raises.

Steve Allen, 71 High Street, Noank, is opposed to an increase in the budget and strongly encouraged the Council to seek a 0% increase for the 2010 budget year. He then read a letter from Ed Eckelmeyer. Mr. Eckelmeyer feels that the federal government has failed to do its job in controlling expenses. He would like no increase in current budget levels, and would like the Town to reduce the number of automobiles, SUVs, and small trucks it owns, thus saving fuel, insurance, maintenance and capital costs.

Lisa Tess, 84 Ensign Drive, Mystic, thinks that no further decreases should be made to the Board of Education budget, and that further cuts would be irresponsible. Ms. Tess believes that the Family Support Center needs to remain at its current location, as many of the local residents do not have the means to transport themselves to the Social Services building. She remarked that the Parks and Recreation programs are incredibly successful in Groton and cautions Councilors not to overprice or cut too much from these programs.

Kit Talbot, 10 Florence Drive, Mystic, spoke in behalf of the community boating programs at Beebe Cove. She stated that until recently the Town has maintained the docks; however this funding has been cut from the 2010 budget. Ms. Talbot added that other Parks and Recreation programs do not pay for maintenance of playing fields or other recreational facilities, and requested that the Town budget fully support the maintenance costs of the docks.

Kristen Negaard O'Brien, 99 Noble Avenue, Noank, is also in support of the rowing programs at Beebe Cove. As a coach for both Fitch Senior High School and the Parks and Recreation Department, she stated that the fee increases due to dock maintenance costs will actually be paid by rowers which are eighth through twelfth graders, and this cost burden should not be placed on students.

George O'Brien, 99 Noble Avenue, Noank, registered his support for the rowing program at Spicer Park. He noted that the largest budget cuts have been in Public Works and Parks and Recreation and stated that increasing fees and reducing coaches' salaries will only result in fewer people participating in programs. The current rowing program is run by two coaches and a tremendous volunteer work force. These volunteers have repaired boats instead of purchasing new ones in an effort to keep these programs available to anyone who wants to participate.

Ed Ettinger, 174 Cedar Road, Mystic, requested that Councilors and RTM members rein in the Education Budget, as this will further burden the residents of Groton. If not layoffs, he would like to see cutbacks, freezing of raises, higher co-pays on benefits, and looking into children living on tax exempt properties.

Lea Graner Kennedy, 152 Cedar Road, Mystic, expressed her support for the Board of Education budget. She stressed the importance of supporting the new superintendent and of keeping the local housing market viable in the face of the current recession. She also noted that the Town will receive stimulus money through the Education Cost-Sharing Grant.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Harry Watson declared the public hearing closed at 9:32 p.m.

Attest:

*Barbara Tarbox, Town Clerk
Clerk of the Council*

Lori Watrous, Office Assistant